COACH MART

Issue 620 £1

January 3, 1991

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Cover story: Coach operator Abbeyways-Hanson

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COACH MART
Issue 620 £1 January 3, 1991

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COMMENT

THE ridiculous situation of the OFT considering a 'corner shop' investigation of Eastern Counties' acquisition of six USAF contracts from Suffolk-based Blue Bus Services was only absolved by common sense at the eleventh hour. But under new regulations, the OFT is charging the company £5,000 for the privilege of being investigated.

After a little fact finding the OFT, to its credit, sensibly recommended that no investigation was necessary. But it took the Department of Trade and Industry over three months to let the company know it would not be referring the matter to the MMC. Meanwhile, the Mergers Secretariat began operating a scale of charges, to go some way to cover its costs of investigation, from October 1.

Although Eastern Counties has not been referred it will cost the company £5,000, the minimum fee for investigations involving gross assets under £30 million. For assets between £30 and £100 million, the fee is £10,000, and for anything above this asset valuation investigation costs £15,000.

For the DTI's minister of corporate affairs John Redwood to tell the bus industry the Government is determined to establish healthy competition in this sector, forcing SYT to sell SUT and Stagecoach to sell Portsmouth City Bus, is one thing. But to bristle with readiness at every cottage purchase, and charge investigation fees to operators struggling in this competitive environment, is quite another matter.

THE change in fortunes for Barton Transport plc since the sale of its bus and coach interests is nothing short of remarkable. An overall loss of over £1 million in the year ended September 29, 1989 was transformed to £113,000 profit in the following year.

Disposal of Barton's coach interests reduced staffing from 308 to 5 at a stroke and specialisation in its new activities in property and investment reduced turnover to £187,000. However, the previous loss-making position was transformed rapidly.

With Barton's main activity now centred on obtaining maximum revenue from property letting it is no wonder Barton's directors are taking a close look at its associated company, South Notts Bus Co, Ltd. After contributing £23,000 in 1989 - a fair return on a book value of £125,000 for this 50 percent holding, Barton's share of the 1990 loss was £32,000.

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■BUS

Freeman backs BCC's Buses Mean Business

THE Department of Transport is to respond to BCC's Buses means Business initiative and will promote the use of bus by positive discrimination, according to Transport Minister Roger Freeman.

Speaking at the opening of Drawlane Group's impressive new depot for London & Country, he said greater consumer choice would be brought about by the introduction of new technology and the easing of congestion in London.

The statement is one of the most positive indications so far that BCC's campaign, which called for £17 million of Government money to fund various bus promoting schemes, is about to bear fruit.

Roger Freeman: pledge to promote bus travel.

A spokesman for BCC confirmed that 'all the indications' are optimistic: 'Every conversation we have had with the minister and his advisers so far has been very encouraging. No firm pledge of central funds has been forthcoming yet, but the Minister has undertaken to reply to us in the New Year.'

Mr Freeman has been careful to avoid coming down in favour of any one scheme. But he is pushing Whitehall's commitment to fast-flow Red Routes in London and has hinted that cash might be available for similar traffic management schemes throughout the country.

■BUS

Drawlane opens £6 million depot

DRAWLANE has opened what it claims is the first new purpose built bus garage in Britain since privatisation of NBC began in 1985.

Total cost of the 116,000 sq ft depot and related equipment was £6.1 million.

Transport Minister Roger Freeman cut the tape at the new Croydon garage, which will be used by Drawlane subsidiary, London & Country.

The new facility can accommodate 120 full size vehicles and incorporates Department of Transport approved test facilities and the latest computer controlled fuelling system and vehicle wash.

■TAKEOVER

Losses threaten South Notts

MUNICIPAL operator Nottingham City Transport is being tipped to buy long established independent South Notts Bus Company.

Troubled 28-vehicle South Notts lost £32,000 last year, compared with a profit of £23,000 in 1989. Gilbert Kinch's recently opened Nottingham operation, which trades as Kinchline, is believed to be hitting the company hard.

Mr Kinch claimed he was taking £2,000 in revenue per week from South Notts in the massive Clifton Estate in Nottingham where the two companies compete.

South Notts is half-owned by the family of managing director, Arthur Daybell, and Barton Transport plc. Following the sale of its bus interests to Trent Buses, Barton is primarily a property and investment company.

South Notts: £32,000 loss last year to force sale?

Barton's latest accounts show an overall profit of £113,000 and list its original investment in South Notts as £4,604. Barton revalued its 50 percent shareholding in the associated company in September 1983 at £125,000.

But, in the face of the losses now being incurred by South Notts, chairman Thomas Barton warns that the directors 'are considering what action should be taken.'

Nottingham Transport's managing director Derek Deakin said: 'We have spoken to various people about the possibility of a purchase - and we would obviously be interested as it is a company we could comfortably include into our organisation and rationalise accordingly.'

Mr Daybell declined to comment.

■FARES

Scottish Citylink slashes its fares

SCOTTISH Citylink has cut its fares by 10 to 30 percent and rationalised them on cross-border services to keep pace with National Express.

On many routes, Citylink now has just two or even one fare: 'Some services have the same price for single and return fares,' explained managing director Alan Howes.

The simplification will make tickets eminently saleable by agents, says Mr Howes, when compared to National Express' six-way fare structure. Passengers are becoming increasingly confused by changing coach fares, a West Midlands paper alleged recently.

■LEGISLATION

Two new at W. Alexander

WALTER Alexander has appointed two new sales managers – Ronnie Forsyth and Paul Nicholson – to foster direct contact with customers and potential customers throughout Britain.

Although Mr Forsyth was formerly general manager for sales and production in Scotland for Robert Wright, he was formerly with Alexanders – in the company's buying, specification and engineering departments.

Mr Nicholson was area sales manager for WS Yeates. He will be based in Shrewsbury and responsible for the Midlands and South.

Pictured (left to right) are Ronnie Forsyth, Alexander's executive director Wesley Keys, and Paul Nicholson.

■MANUFACTURING

BREL starts up in bus business

BREL is rebuilding buses at its Derby carriage works and could start building new vehicles if the marketplace improves.

Already BREL has refurbished two of an order for 20 Midland Red South Leyland Nationals, and expects more work to arrive as bus companies bitten by the recession fight shy of buying new vehicles.

Privatised BREL - formerly British Rail Engineering Limited and bought by its managers in 1989 – is trying to reduce its dependence on British Rail and London Underground contracts. A spokesman told *Coachmart* that a good market for refurbishment of buses was seen in the post-deregulated/privatised market.

Trains to buses: BREL is now refurbishing vehicles for MIdland Red South.

Interiors and exteriors are renovated according to a menu of work provided by customers.

The Midland Red South order resulted from a successful trial project with a Yorkshire Rider double-decker at BREL's York works. Vehicle repairs have been moved to Derby where production-line facilities are available.

With its established expertise in rail vehicles there is no logical reason why, long term, BREL could not build complete buses or coaches. However, it said there are no firm plans at present.

BREL ownership is split between Trafalgar House, which has 40 percent, 40 percent for Asea Brown Boveri, and 20 percent owned by management and employees.

■SERVICING

Inflation could save money says ATS

ASSOCIATED Tyre Services claims bad tyre inflation could add 30 percent to fuel bills.

The company says a 10 psi to 15 psi drop in tyre pressure could lose the operator around a third in mileage per gallon, while serious under-inflation could lead to a blow-out, endangering life.

'Operators may be spending far more than they need to unneccesarily, simply because their bus and coach tyres are not at the correct pressure or badly maintained,' said ATS technical expert John Lee.

'There are four points that should concern operators if they want to avoid losing tyre value: fitting, maintenance, loads/inflation and driving methods.'

Mr Lee added that carrying a load with too low a tyre pressure puts excessive strain on tyres causing distortion of the tread and overheating - and speeding also generates greater heat causing tyre wear.

●ATS fleet tyre management service information is available on 0543 414959.

■NEW VEHICLE

Iveco buses go 'green'

IVECO TurboCity buses destined for the UK in 1991 will be supplied with a 'green' option.

Exhaust filters with soot traps have been designed into the bus, and Iveco expects good take-up of the option as pressure from environmentalists targets public transport.

The TurboCity bus will be marketed in the UK next year with modified Alexander Q Type bodywork featuring the Iveco front end. Market research carried out by the Italian-based multinational company foresees market growth due to an expected renewal of Britain's ageing bus fleet - and a thaw in political attitudes to public transport due to growing concern over congestion and environmental pollution.

With over 100 TurboCity buses already equipped with particulate filters in Italy, the company claims emission values are between 10 and 80 percent less than EC standards. Noise is reduced with a 20 percent reduction in engine speed. Engine pre-heating systems are being fitted to eliminate excessive smoke on cold mornings.

Iveco expects that its city bus will be the first in the UK fitted with such equipment, and says its Dailybuses may be specified with particulate filters.

● Iveco is currently undertaking research and development with alternative fuels and has a prototype TurboCity bus running on methane with twin roof-mounted 450-litre fuel tanks. It is also experimenting with battery-powered DailyBuses - and a hybrid bus with a thermal engine combined with battery power to extend length of time on the road.

■OFT INVESTIGATION

OFT clears E. Counties but charges £5,000...

MANAGING director of Eastern Counties Peter Brundle has criticised the Office of Fair Trading for clearing its acquisition of six schools contracts but charging £5,000 for the privilege.

The OFT investigated Eastern Counties' purchase of the US Air Force contracts formerly run by Rallybeam's Blue Bus Services in the Woodbridge area of Suffolk, but the Department of Trade and Industry decided not to refer it to the Monopolies and Mergers Commission.

Mr Brundle feels the original action was ludicrous. And despite being 'acquitted', the company has now been told it has to pay for the preliminary investigations.

'The OFT picked up the acquisition, which was for the contracts only and did not involve any stake in Rallybeam Ltd, from an article in *Coachmart* September 13,' he said. 'We were very surprised this corner-shop level of business was being earmarked for investigation - especially under a Government which allegedly believes in market forces and taking big government off the backs of industry.'

Investigation charges have been introduced by the Mergers Secretariat on a scale which was introduced on October 1. 'No one chooses to be investigated,' added Mr Brundle. 'But this figure is substantially more than fines imposed by Traffic Commissioners for many offences.'

Blue Bus is still trading as a bus operator, but with a reduced level of operation. Eastern Counties, which has a fleet of 366 vehicles, acquired the contracts to interwork with its services from its Ipswich depot.

■OFT INVESTIGATION

...and Rider gets MMC all-clear

YORKSHIRE Rider's takeover of three operators in York is not to be referred to the Monopolies and Mergers Commission.

The Office of Fair Trading has decided that Rider's takeover of the AJS Group's York City and District, Target Travel and the bus work of Reynard Buses is not against the public interest.

'We are greatly relieved,' said Rider managing director and chief executive, Bill Cottham. 'But we were always confident we did not offend any competition law. The acquisitions were outside our West Yorkshire operating area - we did not buy out a competitor.'

Mr Cottham claimed there still some 33 independent companies running bus services in the greater York area, but admitted that Rider currently had 48 percent of the market.

Yorkshire Rider: not refferred to MMC.

■BUS

Crosville Wales rebuilds

CROSVILLE Wales is still counting the cost of its Wrexham strike despite having built up to its rationalised staff level by taking on 12 drivers.

Managing director John Rimmington said at least half the National Express subsidiary's business went with the strike and it will be well into the new year before much of the ground has been regained from Wrights of Wrexham.

'John Wright won't be having a wrinkle-free 1991,' said Mr Rimmington.

■BUS

Jobs axed at West Riding

WEST Riding has made 36 maintenance workers redundant due to changes in its fleet profile and vehicle purchase policy.

The works is now left with 34 maintenance staff, 12 apprentices and four workers who are about to retire. Redundancies were caused by the ending of West Riding's Olympian overhaul programme in January. Investment in new vehicles with favourable warranty terms means it does not have to carry the same level of maintenance staff.

■BRIEFS

WORKERS at municipal company Grimsby and Cleethorpes Transport have voted to accept an 8 percent pay offer, ending fears of industrial action.

ACCRINGTON-based Hyndburn Transport has scrapped its 'Helping Hands' scheme because it has not generated extra revenue. Hyndburn was partly helped by Age Concern, who provided the helpers, but finance for paying helpers was provided by the operating company.

LONDON Forest, a subsidiary of London Buses, is modifying the interior of over 200 of its Leyland Titans to assist people with walking difficulties and sight or hearing problems. The inhabitants of Waltham Forest and Hackney benefit from highlighted step markings, easier to use textured handrails, palm-operated bell pushes, and bus stopping signs. The £1.5 million programme will cover all London Transport routes by 1992.

MID-GLAMORGAN council is being asked to foot the bill for five new tendered services - the result of National Welsh cuts in the Ogwr, Merthyr and Taff Ely areas. National Welsh is cutting off-peak and midweek buses but is expected to tender for them if the council grants them financial support.

AJS subsidiary Sovereign Bus and Coach has moved its headquarters from Hatfield to Stevenage. Planning permission has been granted for a three-bay workshop on a new site, and the 19-strong fleet will join administrative staff in the new year. Hatfield will remain an operational base.

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***Coachmart* is constantly on the lookout for news of fleet additions. Whether the vehicle be new or used, large or small it doesn't matter, but please get pictures - prints or slides - to Fleet Update as soon as possible. If you have acquired or, if you are a dealer, have sold a vehicle of interest to the industry drop a line to Fleet Update, *Coachmart*, Wentworth House, Wentworth Street, Peterborough PE1 1DS. The service is free.**

Midland United scores with Volvo

THIS Van Hool Astral is a dateless design with dateless registration - but operated by a company of the 90s on Timescape shuttle work.

Sue and Stuart Cleaver have expanded their two coach Midland United Transport Co with the Volvo B10M-based 58-seater.

The Coleshill firm, based near the NEC, needed a third vehicle for a 1991 Timescape contract. The coach will travel weekly on shuttle and tour work to Austria, Italy and Spain, so reliability was high on the list of priorities. Having standardised on Volvo after boldly moving upmarket last year, the decision to go for Volvo again was inevitable.

Looking back on a successful year with their Midland Cruiser vehicle (featured in *Coachmart* 598 July 26, 1990) Sue and Stuart went in search of a similar coach. Hughes DAF came up with the perfect answer at the right price, and prepared the Van Hool-bodied Volvo, with rear sunken lounge, for delivery in December.

A respray in brilliant white costing £1,500 was included in the work, bringing the coach into line for its Timescape role. Additional work brought add-on costs up

to £6,000 - these included seat belts for Tempo 100, new carpets, video system, headrest covers, curtains and water boiler.

The Volvo's first trip with its new owners was on hire to National Express. The coach proved to be mechanically fault-free on a round-trip of 680 miles with *Coachmart's* Mike Morgan as co-driver.

Starting from Birmingham's Digbeth coach station, the first leg was to duplicate the 'service car' on the Heathrow/Gatwick Rapide. Instead of the expected 1800 hr return, an emergency dash to Victoria through Friday night rush-hour traffic was required to

cover for a break-down on the 572 to Burnley.

Any doubts about the wisdom of such a long trip with a previously unknown coach had been dispelled. The 12-month old engine was proving its worth, the splitter worked well, and only minor bodywork problems were apparent - the fridge door handle broke off, the rear plug door was not sealing properly and where to put fresh water was a mystery!

Although the rear passenger entrance meant that driver contact with their passengers was kept to a minimum, the National Express customers compared the Astral favourably with the more usual express coach. Underfloor/over chassis luggage lockers were ideal - there's no back-bending when loading, and Sue Cleaver found the rear lounge servery worked well even if the stairway requires difficult negotiation with cups of hot coffee.

The quality of the vehicle and regular supply of drinks and fresh sandwiches compensated satisfactorily for late arrival in north-east Lancashire. Heavy traffic, thick fog and freezing temperatures had conspired against punctuality, but you can't beat the pleasure of arriving in Burnley's deserted bus station in the very early hours of Saturday morning...

Buses get on board at Thamesway

BADGERLINE'S newest company, Thamesway of Basildon, has added its first new buses.

After purchase by Badgerline Holdings earlier in the year, Thamesway was formed out of the July split of Eastern National's operations giving Thamesway southern Essex and East London and leaving Eastern National to northern Essex and part of Hertfordshire.

The six Reeve Burgess

Beaver minibuses are for London Transport tendered route 362 in East London, running from Chadwell Heath to Barkingside. They are 23-seaters with luggage pen and special features to meet London Transport's requirements.

The latest vehicles, based on Mercedes Benz 709D chassis with automatic gearboxes, bring the total number of Reeve Burgess Beavers operated by Thamesway to 24.

Shearings takes five

SHEARINGS Holidays, Europe's largest coach operator, is introducing five T815A Alizee coaches to its continental holiday programme in 1991. They are the first Van Hool complete vehicles operated by Shearings, and feature automatic air conditioning - another first.

Said Ian Longworth, transport director for Shearings Holidays: 'They will be introduced to the Rome and Sorrento routes where the normal air conditioning on coaches has proved insufficient to cope with the higher temperatures. The coaches have been on trial in Brussels this September and we are now satisfied that they will make a significant improvement to passenger comfort on our continental routes.'

The Alizees are built on Van Hool's own chassis fitted with Cummins LTA 10 engine and ZF 5HP 590 gearbox to meet Shearings requirements. They are to standard 53 reclining seat specification, and include double glazing, footrests, headrests, and split front screen.

Included in Shearings £16 million, 136-vehicle order for 1991 delivery aré 15 Scania K113s and 75 Volvo B10Ms, with bodywork contracts split between Plaxton and Van Hool.

New generation is 'excellent'

IPSWICH Buses has added three 'new generation' MetroRiders after satisfactory operation with four Optare-built vehicles delivered in 1990.

Barry Moore, managing director of Ispwich Buses, said: 'The new generation is a significant improvement on the MCW-built vehicle which we operate. The engineering and body improvement package are a credit to Optare and we are pleased to have now received our second batch of these excellent vehicles.'

Specification is the same as the earlier delivery with luggage pen, 31 bus-type seats and 12 standees. Full, soft trim co-ordinates with the seat moquette in a vehicle considered suitable for local service and private hire.

Optare MetroRiders are fitted with six-litre Cummins engines, an Allison AT545 fully automatic gearbox, and power assisted steering as standard.

Van Hool c'est magnifique

THE impressive Van Hool high-decker TG822 could become a familiar sight on continental roads this summer following the opening of French roads to articulated coaches in July. Developed from the T816 Altano, the first 18 metre 'jumbo' articulated coach of this type was launched at the International Brussels Travel Fair (*Coachmart* 616 November 29, 1990).

Owned by Maxi Coach Tours from Louvain, Belgium, the TG822 retains the manoeuvrability of a non-articulated 12-metre coach thanks to its steered fourth axle. With 3.765 metre height it offers greater route flexibility than a double-decker while offering superior interior height (1.82 metre compared with 1.8/1.705 on an Astromega) with all passengers at the same level.

The luggage compartment is exceptionally large at 16.5 cubic metres on the Maxi Coach Tours vehicle, but 25.3 cubic metres is possible where only one bunk is fitted.

The interior arrangement on the Maxi Coach Tours vehicle incorporates 42 Royal Class seats in the front section, with drivers berth and toilet/washroom underneath. An additional 24 seats are fitted in the rear saloon over the top of seven passenger berths.

A fully equipped bar completes a luxurious 66-seater long-distance shuttle vehicle which is marketed by Maxi Coach Tours as its Hotel Bus.

Van Hool have a normal height T815 Alicron version in production. Meanwhile British operators are constrained by discriminatory regulations restricting articulated coaches to 60 mph on motorways.

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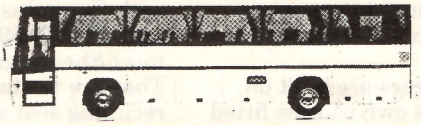

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From James McCutcheon

SIR

I must reply to H D Liebner's letter in *Coachmart* 617, December 6 regarding bus manufacturing in Northern Ireland.

During the past seven years I have read *Coachmart* from cover to cover and have found the articles and letters interesting, informative, helpful and on occasions amusing. I have never, however, read such absolute twaddle as the letter from H D Liebner.

Despite over 20 years of 'troubles' and thousands of deaths, he or she has not yet realised that Northern Ireland is still part of Britain. No vehicle sold within a country is an export. I am sure Plaxton, for example, would not consider a coach sold to an operator in Scotland or Wales as an export.

Furthermore, as British citizens, both the manufacturers and their employees are paying their fair share of taxes to Westminster as we all do here in Northern Ireland.

There have been many schemes over the years to help companies here to overcome the added difficulties they face. Some are Government funded, but many are also funded by the International Fund for Ireland (USA) and by the EEC in Brussels. These are to help companies here compete on equal terms, NOT to give them an unfair advantage.

The Capital Grant mentioned is NOT paid to the manufacturers, but to the company purchasing the vehicle and this is paid in place of the route subsidies which mainland companies receive. In practice this means that only the Government owned Ulsterbus/Citybus giant can receive such grants as they are the only company who can get a licence to operate stage carriage services.

This is ultimately a paper exercise as the Department of Environment who pay this grant also own the company receiving it. This Government owned company is also making a substantial profit (1987/88 £3.9 million) with the help of the legal monopoly it still enjoys.

A recent report by the Monopolies and Mergers Commission examined this system and concluded that the administration of route subsidies would be too expensive to introduce and therefore recommended that the Capital Grant should not be changed at this moment in time.

One of the manufacturing companies referred to is, I presume, Walter Alexanders who I am sure will confirm that almost all of their Belfast production is for Northern Ireland based companies such as Ulsterbus/Citybus, education and library boards etc.

The other I presume is Rbt Wright & Sons who only produce vehicles in the 15-35 seater range. Their work is a mixture of 'one-off' minibus conversions for local private operators like myself, some school buses and they specialise in welfare vehicles. I admit that Wrights have recently won an order for a number of Dennis Darts from LT (perhaps this prompted H D Liebner's letter). However one order for some midi-buses is not going to put any mainland coachbuilder into receivership.

Wrights have recently moved to new premises. However, I understand the main reason for this was that one half of their original works was completely destroyed by a fire some months ago.

I should point out that Wrights do not produce any full size vehicles and neither Wrights nor Alexanders produce any coaches.

At the moment the only unfair aspect of the Bus and Coach industry in Northern Ireland is the monopoly held by Ulsterbus. It is only in the last 12 months that private operators here have been able to get a licence for excursions and tours, the first express licence was only issued two months ago after pressure from our recently formed association and it is still almost impossible to have a licence granted for stage carriage services. We still have to operate under legislation introduced in the Transport Act (N.I.) 1967.

Obviously H D Liebner does not welcome a few sales of new vehicles from Northern Ireland, even though the chassis are mainland produced. However no one has ever objected to the thousands of sales to Ireland (North and South) of ageing secondhand coaches. Can you imagine the value of 1973-1983 vehicles if the mainland dealers were banned form 'exporting' them to us!

Finally I cannot comment on the reference to black taxis as it does not appear to make any sense. I would say, however, that H D Liebner's description of Northern Ireland as 'out there' perhaps explains his/her attitude.

Northern Ireland is still 'right here' in the UK.

JAMES IAN MCCUTCHEON
LAKELAND TOURS
28 LOUGH EYES ROAD
LISBELLAW
CO FERMANAGH

Send your letters to:
The Editor, Coachmart,
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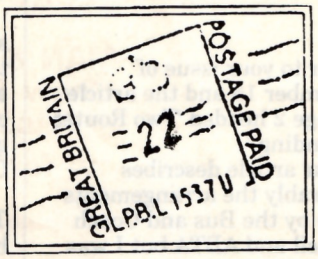

The Editor is always pleased to receive letters for publication in Coachmart and will, if requested, publish these anonymously. But please attach your name and address for our own information.

Well done Nat Ex

From David Barrow

SIR

I would like to take this opportunity to put pen to paper to inform you of the exceptional service supplied by National Express and Birmingham City Council, during the recent heavy snow over the weekend 8/9 December.

Our journey from Manchester to London was curtailed at Birmingham due to the worsening weather and non-moving traffic near to the M1-M6 interchange.

On abandoning a return trip to Manchester that day, National Express did their best to make us comfortable at Digbeth coach station, supplying us with soup, sandwiches and hot drinks.

By last Saturday evening the number of coaches had grown considerably. We were then ferried by a fleet of coaches to Birmingham City Hall, where we were supplied with blankets and sleeping bags and bedded down for the night on the floor of the main hall.

On Sunday morning all four hundred of us were given a superb breakfast, which would have shamed a four star hotel.

I hope you print this letter, to thank National Express and Birmingham City Council for their superb hospitality over a very difficult 23 hour period.

DAVID BARROW
BURY
LANCS

PS Well done the Neoplan Skyliner! When buses in Birmingham from that city's well known manufacturer had become stranded at the side of the road, the Skyliner just kept on going.

Bonding information is now available

From Harry Chandler

SIR

I refer to your issue of November 15 and the article on page 2 headed 'Two Routes to Bonding.'

Your article describes admirably the arrangements made by the Bus and Coach Council and ABTA but I was surprised to note that you make no mention of the Bonding Scheme for Tour Operators introduced by this organisation 20 years ago from which two schemes spring.

Since then this bonding scheme has been adopted by the Civil Aviation Authority and extended to all tour operators as a condition of the granting of an Air Travel Organisers Licence.

During the 20 years the TOSG Bonding Scheme has been in existence more than 1 million holidaymakers have benefited from it either by completion of their holiday or the refund of cash paid in advance. The total cost exceeded £50 million in respect of the failure of 139 tour operators during that period.

Your readers are welcome to write to me for more information about our scheme at the address given below.

HARRY CHANDLER
TOUR OPERATORS' STUDY GROUP
34 HALL LANE
UPMINSTER
ESSEX
RM14 1AF

Professor answers deregulation critic

From John Hibbs

SIR

Mr Mackenzie lets himself down sadly (*Coachmart*, December 6). First by quoting largely irrelevant statistics that merely confuse my argument, and a second time because he can never resist a chance to snipe at me over deregulation.

My purpose in drawing attention to the *colectivos* that provide the greater part of public transport in Buenos Aires was just to observe that the minibus can be a successful mode of urban transport for the basic needs of a very 'European' city. Unlike Mr Mackenzie, I have studied them at first hand.

As to the regulatory system, I have never argued that it was a 'free-for-all', and the point is irrelevant. But I can assure Mr Mackenzie that the private co-ownership firms are profitable, and that the *colectivos* are universally popular, having been described as 'less a form of transport and more a way of life'. I hope the same compliment can be paid to the services of Mr Mackenzie's own empressa (the word, after all, simply means 'firm' or 'enterprise').

In the reports that I have published I have duly explained that the form of regulatory control is designed to harness the enterprise of individual owners in the provision of a public service, and that it is marked by considerable flexibility. I have not, of course, attempted any value judgement in reporting matters of fact.

I suggest it would be equally proper if Mr Mackenzie would observe a similar self-discipline.

PROFESSOR JOHN HIBBS
BIRMINGHAM POLYTECHNIC
BUSINESS SCHOOL

Take out cover

From Christopher Curson

SIR

I have followed with interest the recent articles and correspondence in *Coachmart* in connection with bonding. The proposed legislation is obviously of concern to many operators.

Whilst your contributors have mentioned BCC's Bonded Coach Holiday Scheme and ABTA's bonding scheme, operators may be interested to know that bonds can be purchased in the insurance market subject to the provision of adequate financial information.

Whilst a bond may also be provided by an operator's bank, my experience is that the amount for which the bond is effected will normally be deducted from any facilities otherwise made available to the operator by the bank. A bond effected in the insurance market will usually be free from any such restrictions.

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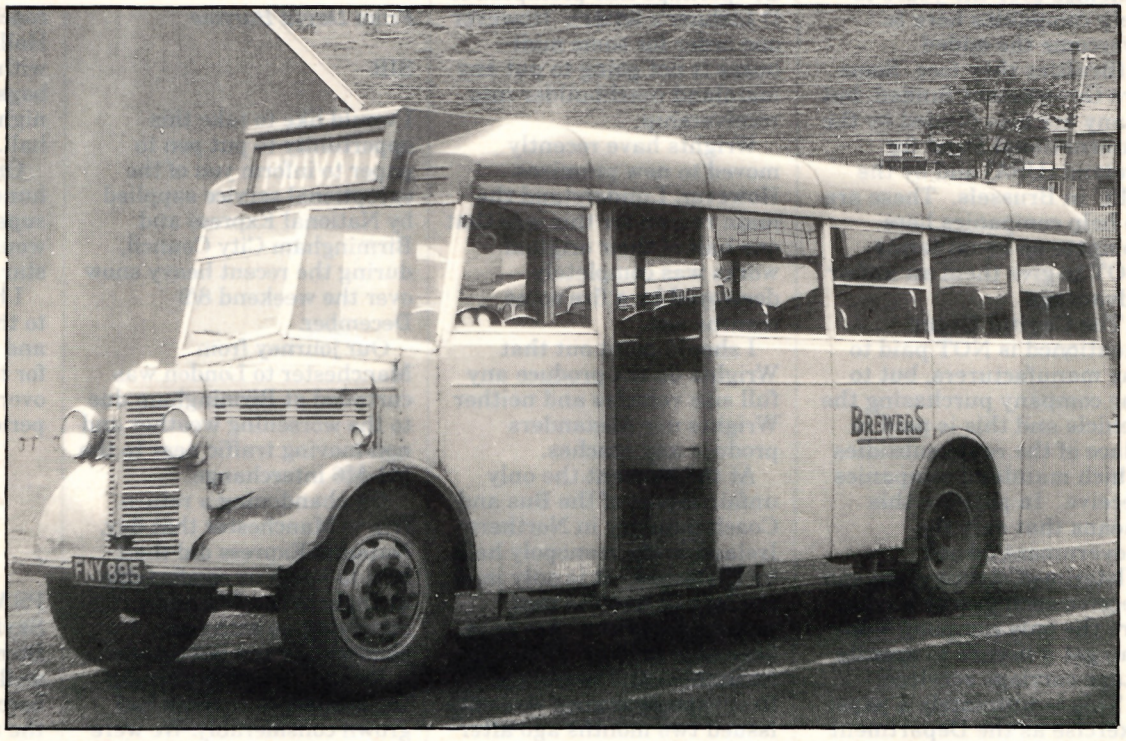
Nostalgia Corner



OLD Bedfords just keep on going. This OWB built to war-time utility specification is similar to many snapped up by independent operators to cope with the post-way boom.

In the early post-War years new coaches were hard to come by and many businesses expanded with the help of these vehicles - quickly discarded by larger companies once hostilities ceased.

A late survivor of the marque was this one still going strong with Welsh operator Brewer of Caerau in 1962.

Old Scarlett is still going strong

VISCOUNT Bus and Coach isn't losing sight of Peterborough's heritage despite the fact that most coaches which pitch up in the city are on shopping trips.

Viscount's 1966 Bristol FLF6G half-cab double-deck - having clocked up more than a million miles and 26 years' service - has at last been christened. The name picked is Old Scarlett.

The red-and-cream Eastern Counties livery is, though, not the reason for the name. Old Scarlett is the nickname for Peterborough Cathedral's celebrated sexton, Robert Scarlett.

The 16th Century cleric born in 1496 lived long enough to bury two queens in the Cathedral - Henry VIII's first wife Katherine of Aragon and Mary Queen of Scots. When he required the services of a sexton himself, it was 1594 and he'd clocked up 98 years.

What many people don't realise is that Old Scarlett was the first coach passenger to complain about the standard of local services. It was 1545 when the venerable sexton set out to catch Ye Viscounte Stamford Flyer, paying a groat for a stand-by return to the town. He complained because it didn't arrive until 1635...

● THE Boys in Blue at the Met - aka Sgt Bob Pilbeam - inform the magazine that a Ban The War In The Gulf march has been organised in the capital.

It starts at Hyde Park at 1300 hrs, going via Park Lane, Piccadilly, Haymarket, and Pall Mall to Trafalgar Square. Park Lane northbound will be closed as the 10,000 demonstrators cross.

Perhaps most confusing is the date of the Ban The War march. It's January 12, three days before the deadline set by the UN for Saddam Hussein to pull out of Kuwait, and thus three days before any war is likely to start...

● FOLLOWING *Mealstop's* revelation that BCC president and Thamesdown boss John Owen had incurred the wrath of a formidable number of mothers by cutting their bus service down, we had a 'phone call.

Mealstop

It was Mr Owen, who said that, just like the BCC, Thamesdown listens to its customers. As a result, double-deck buses will be returned to the Pinehurst area of Swindon.

Perhaps the ladies who so successfully canvassed this time would like to take a trip to Brussels and prevent the Eurocrats from getting rid of double-decks, too...

● IN a scheme sponsored by a brewery, Grampian Transport has offered free bus travel between 11.30 pm and 6 am to Scottish Hogmanay drinkers. These timings coincide nicely with serious Scottish drinkers beginning and ending a proper drinking session.

Buying?

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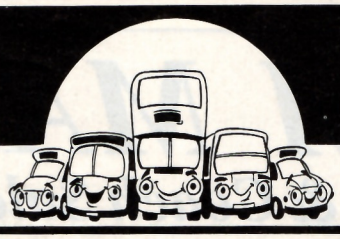

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JUST A FEW EXAMPLES

OCT '86 OPTARE CITYPACER VOLKSWAGEN, LT55 engine, 5 speed, manual gearbox, 25 d/p seals, MoT 27.7.91.....**£12,500**

1985 LEYLAND TIGER 245 DUPLE CARIBBEAN II, 48 recliners plus courier, toilet, d... ...zed windows, curtains, ...ables, power door, dri... ...ge, twin fuel tanks, Eberspacher and driver bunk, MoT 21.3.91. Stock No. M011 .....**£31,500**

SOLD

1985 SCANIA K112 JONCKHEERE P50, 49 recliners ...ken toilet, o/s centre c... ...or, driver's bunk, tinte... ...ws, rollo blinds, MoT 19. .... ~~£46,500~~ **£35,000**

SOLD

1984 SCANIA K112 JONCKHEERE P50, 49/51/53 recli... o/s sunken toilet, o/s ...ental door, driver's bu... ...ndows, rollo blinds, MoT ...91. Stock Nos. M104, M105 & M106 ..... ~~£41,500~~ **£33,000**

SOLD

1977 FORD R111... ...AXTON, 53 seats (Ford r... engine) power door, M... ...1. Stock No. M010 .....**£3,500**

SOLD

1975 BRISTOL VRT, (Gardner 180 engine), 74 seats ECW (low bridge) MoT's Feb & May 1991. Choice of two. Stock Nos. M012, M013 ..... ~~£3,450~~ **£2,950**

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1982 LEYLAND LEOPARD 680, semi auto Plaxton, 50 reclining seats, MoT May 1991 .....**£19,500**

1979 VOLVO B58 DUPLE DOMINANT, 53 seats, MoT July 1991.....**£15,000**

1975 BEDFORD with Plaxton Elite body. 500 engine, 53 seats.

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Make sure you create the right impression

NEXT week, as promised, I am going to open the debate, 'Bankruptcy, Inevitable or Avoidable?' But for now, while the holiday spirit still prevails, feast the mind on a few lighter items.

Why are answerphone messages so dreary? Some years ago, when you could only lease these contraptions and a month's rental was today's outright purchase price, I had an inexpensive Telecom machine which gave messages, but did not take them. Not only did I vary the message frequently, and at least weekly, I also perfected such a style that people confessed to ringing up to just listen to the message. Dictated with tasteful background music playing, it would go something like this:

'Hi there, thanks for calling Marksman Coaches. Although this sounds real it is a recording. Hey, relax. Don't hang up - no one is going to ask you to say anything. Did you call to ask about our weekend excursions - you're in luck, there are still a few places left on most of them. Make sure you grab a copy of our new brochure, it's out next week and packed with trips too good to miss. I don't suppose you work 24 hours a day, and neither do I, so that's why you have got magic mouth movements on magnetic tape. But you can talk to us live in normal office hours of... It will be super to hear from you then, and remember, Marksman Coaches has ways of making you have a nice day.'

As often as not, Betsy would make the tape, the sensuosity of a female voice being more attractive than my growl. In essence, no apology was offered for not working all the hours of the night or weekend, nor were alternative phone numbers offered. Above all, it was lighthearted and 'listenable to' and always included a bit of advertising splurge and encouraged callers to remember to make contact for this enquiry, and in the future, during office hours. So successful was this campaign that I now have no use for answerphones. When I am in the office out of normal hours, the business phone rarely rings.

I suggest that there is considerable untapped scope to make people want to speak to today's machines, rather than cut off with no message, or pass a rude comment about answering machines and their owners. Listening to some recorded messages, one gets the impression that it is the called rather than the caller who shirks from recording messages. My recommendations are that you use someone with a pleasant voice and script them to talk in an easy, conversational manner; with a positive message and perhaps throw down the challenge to the caller to leave a message. How about, 'Hey, don't talk until I have finished, but are you ready to tell us who you are and what we can do for you. It's your turn now, so off you go...'.

Here's some holiday howlers!

HERE are a few funnies to finish off the festive season!

Tony Laver's recent appeal in *Coachmart* for certain back issues had unexpected consequences. To the enlightened delight of members of his staff who had the opportunity to view his post before he opened it, a small, tubular parcel from Scarborough came gift-wrapped in paper embossed with the message, 'A Gift from the Memorable Moments Supply Company (Batteries Not Included).'

He is still trying to convince the girls in his office that all it contained was some tightly rolled-up old copies of *Coachmart!* Tony tells me, that in true green, waste not want not, spirit, he is planning to recycle this wrapping paper. It might come to you next!

Despite the much criticised (though not by me) 'Graffiti signature buses' of Bus & Coach Council's 'Buses Mean Business' campaign, some BCC members feel that there needs to be greater awareness of the targets by members of the general public. One suggestion is stickers in the rear window of buses declaiming, 'Bus Drivers Do It Quicker In Bus Lanes.'

The 1990 Stagecoach Group calendar had the dates in November pitched on the wrong days and a sticker had to be sent out to effect a correction. BCC, perhaps to draw members attention to it when they send out their correction sticker (and to get a mention in this column!) have made a (deliberate?) error on their 1991 events and meetings diary card. The Coaching Conference is shown as being held February 1–3. In fact, the recently despatched booking pack has the correct dates: March 1–3.

Despite the supply side of our industry feigning death due to lack of orders, London & Country Buses of Reigate cannot get delivery of 11 new double-deckers, and is having to operate London bus services with vehicles hired in from (and still liveried) Sheffield Mainline. Londoners are joking that drivers are lost. The black comedy is that it is suppliers who seem to have lost their way.

We all know about the gems of language curiosities when Japanese books are translated into English. Euro-speak is bringing this nearer to home. A report on the future of tourism said that, 'Mass tourism degraded the environment,' and called for, 'the promotion of agro tourism,' adding that this gave an added advantage of extending the tourism season.

Does it mean that traffic to football is to be subsidised or that off season beer festival tours will include a free five-litre pack of ale?

Quality tours?

YOU think your tours offer guaranteed quality yet fear that you may have pitched the price too high to attract full loadings? You are nowhere near the limit yet!

Seen in a recent Sunday supplement: the opportunity to join 'A 21-day Trans-Polar expedition aboard a Soviet nuclear-powered icebreaker.' The advert quotes the tour leader as saying that no other vessel could virtually guarantee a successful transit of the North East Passage, but it does not explain the fate of the tourists should the 'virtual' guarantee not quite make it. The price starts from £16,950 and better cabins will set you back £21,500. Deposits of £3,500 to Voyages Jules Verne on booking, with a second deposit of £6,000 due shortly and the remaining balance five months before departure.

A BREATH OF FRESH AIR

You can't beat the feel of fresh-air motoring... witness the growing popularity of the Cabriolet in the car market. Mike Morgan was introduced to the pleasures of the soft-top when he road tested Thornycroft's extended-wheelbase A1.

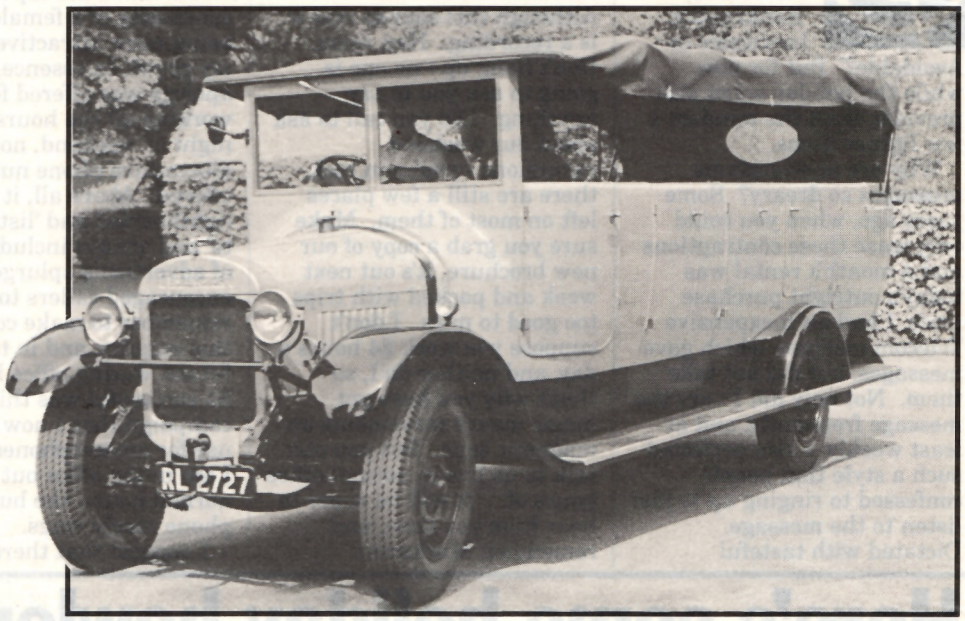
NICK Warner had a timely warning: 'Don't forget the accelerator's in the middle.' It's strange what happens to your right foot when it's had life-long conditioning to reacting to panic situations, only to find the brake pedal isn't where it should be.

The fascination for vintage vehicles often lies in the expensive attraction of nostalgia and the apparent miracle of survival. There is a temptation to regard old vehicles as fragile, but this 1926 Thornycroft charabanc has a defiant indestructability. It proved to be far less fragile than my confidence.

Warners of Tewkesbury returned its former coach to the road in 1981. Although the bodywork was completely rebuilt by Carlton Coachbuilders, the chassis is original. The engine and gearbox are just as they were when Nick Warner's grandfather, Harold F Warner, bought the vehicle from a Cornish operator in 1930. The vehicle's history and condition stressed the value of the vehicle and explained my cautious respect.

Engaging gear, releasing the handbrake, and moving forward was an exhiliarating experience unequalled by modern coaches. Acceleration was virtually non-existent. Five yards' limited progress up the road was accompanied by a frightening cacophony of mechanical protest. The speedometer

Nick Warner: knows his machine.



Re-bodied 1926 Thornycroft charabanc: defiantly indestructable.

drive was disconnected, so speed could not be recorded, but there is no doubt I could have walked faster.

Second gear seemed a good idea, but the well-tried crash gearbox technique of double declutching and allowing engine revs to die resulted only in all forward motion being lost.

Caution and respect were simultaneously thrown to the wind. The beast had to be tamed. At the second attempt, determination and better timing brought that pleasurable sensation of success. We were bowling along in top gear and nearing a bend in the lane approaching Bredon Hill. The speed - almost 20 mph - suddenly seemed indecent. Where was that footbrake?

The message from brain to foot took longer than usual. Eventual foot pressure was heavier than at first intended, yet the thing wouldn't slow down. During the interlude between the braking intention and the realisation, Nick Warner advised that brakes were fitted only on the rear wheels. Before we slowed down, he had time to relate the story of one of the Thornycroft's unplanned excursions when carrying hay for the farmer who used it as a lorry after its first life as a people carrier. In a similar situation - approaching a corner too fast - the lorry driver steered into a convenient barn rather than face catastrophy.

Meanwhile, back at the wheel I noticed we had indeed slowed down. There was some sensation of retardation aided by a slick change down. The dead feel through the pedal was misleading - heavy pressure did work, but there was no risk of locking the back wheels. Who needs ABS?

Steering proved to be remarkably positive. No soft-touch wheel or finger-light power assistance. The steering wheel was cold, but the charabanc went where it was pointed without too much effort. After a few miles I felt sure that road holding was impeccable - though I couldn't bring myself to test it. The miracle of this machine's survival was no longer a mystery, because it felt as solid as a tank.

Driving from the fixed, bench seat becomes comfortable and relaxed once you've got its measure. Read the road ahead, plan your driving, and everything slots into place - nearly every time. Even the noise takes on an acceptable melody.

Equipment is inevitably very basic. Stalling the engine in traffic is not recommended unless the driver wants to

create a spectacle in the middle of Tewkesbury High Street. Courtesy to pedestrians is one thing, but attracting an audience while swinging the starting handle is something else.

Not that starting is difficult. Well, that's what I was told. My previous experience with a starting handle is thankfully a distant memory. In the days when cold starting attempts drained batteries before firing the engine, I regularly used my Ford Prefect's handle first thing in the morning.

Some concessions to modern needs have been added to the specification.

A centrally-mounted toggle switch activates the clockwork indicator mechanism. When changing direction in traffic, the slow Thornycroft confronts the dangers of modern vehicle speeds.

An old favourite with a new admirer.

Riders of bikes and horses must have a similar experience. Car drivers do not appreciate your predicament. Turning right into a de-restricted dual carriageway is a case in point - nobody slows down to give you the yards of road needed to accelerate (if that's not too strong a word) to safety.

Warners' restoration of its old stalwart is understandable in the context of a family business discovering the vehicle used by its founder. But for all its charm, is the Thorneycroft a commercial proposition for nostalgia tours?

Costs of rebuilding the bodywork included three years of craftsmanship, drawing from old photographs. The rexine folding roof costs £3,000 and has a ten-year life as a consequence of wear from the roof sticks. Unlike quick-fold sports car soft-tops, erecting this roof is not a two-minute job.

As if the total lack of side windows wasn't enough, the original Mumford body had an opening windscreen. Without wipers, drivers had no option but to open up in heavy rain, and the hardy occupants received the full blast from the elements.

To be fair, charabancs were on their way out by 1926 and this restored coach is definitely a fair-weather machine. In some respects it is mechanically sophisticated. Pneumatic tyres are original equipment and the FB engine is considered advanced for its day. Its survival alone is impressive.

Although bolstered by new or remanufactured bearings, valves and water pump pulley, the engine is now tired and lacking its original urge. Constantly on the look-out for Thornycroft parts, Nick Warner has located another engine which will be rebuilt.

The porous qualities of the radiator need attention and to this end the company would be very pleased to hear of a suitable replacement.

Inspite of the need to excercise care by keeping mileage within reasonable bounds, the Thornycroft is available for weddings and similar special hire.

The vehicle might be tempted to show complete contempt for the regulations but might nonetheless qualify for PSV testing. Nick Warner believes that since pre -1960 HGVs are exempt from plating, the same rule should apply to passenger carrying vehicles.

Why shouldn't a 1926 coach be tested by 1926 standards? The inspectors' problem is that there was no certificate of initial fitness requirements in those days. One minor difficulty is determining the number of seats. There are five bench seats, yet the Hackney plate as shown in original photographs is for 20 passengers.

Bearing in mind heritage and intermediate agricultural history, the Thornycroft could be successfully tested as a goods vehicle, but that would defeat the object of spending up to £20,000 on the rebuild.

A conservative valuation of £25,000 is placed on this piece of history. However, it can fairly be considered priceless. It has a special place in the Warner family history and is immaculate in the blue livery used when it was displayed at the seventh Commercial Motor Exhibition at Olympia in 1925.

SPECIFICATION

Chassis:	1926 long wheelbase Thornycroft A1 adapted for coaches
Body:	original Mumford of Plymouth 20-seat charabanc replaced by replica completed by Carlton Coachbuilders Cheltenham in 1980.
Engine:	Thorneycroft FB in-line four cylinder petrol
Max Power:	25 hp @ 1,500 rpm
Gearbox:	Thorneycroft four speed constant mesh
Steering:	un-assisted
Brakes:	rear drum only
Clutch:	direct operation
Suspension:	Front: leaf Rear: leaf
Speedlimiter:	Exempt
Tyres:	Firestone 750x20

COST

1924 11ft 6in chassis	£450
1924 14ft chassis	£525
1990 valuation	£25,000
Extras:	
Engine starter (not fitted) and lights	£36
Lighting equipment only	£23
Mechanically operated tyre inflator, operated from a shaft in the gearbox	£10

PERFORMANCE

Gear	Speed		
1st	6 mph	2nd	9 mph
3rd	16 mph	4th	25 mph

FUEL ECONOMY

'The A1 type vehicle, intelligently handled and in reasonably good condition, will give a petrol consumption of about 15 miles per gallon.' (Thornycroft A1 Type Chassis Instruction Book, November 1927)

AT A GLANCE

Ride Quality:	Smooth relaxed ride regardless of speed - even on country roads. Excellent for a lorry based chassis. Very good road holding, resulting from extended wheelbase and body width within axle track. Very solid feel.
Steering:	Heavy, but very positive and predictable. Few turns from lock to lock. Not heavy enough to justify a power steering option.
Braking:	Foot brake works on rear wheels only. Firm pressure giving a response in-line with engine performance. Consistent and predictable, but emergency stops almost impossible.
Noise:	Very high at maximum revs, but fairly refined at cruising speed. Wind noise part of the fun.
Luggage Accomm:	Very limited. Small boot for tools. Space under seats for luggage.
Security:	Concealed ignition switch and T key lock on boot.
Heating:	Uncontrolled output from engine poorly distributed.
Ventilation:	Fresh air from all sides despite fixed windscreen and hood up.
Lighting:	Interior: moonlight. Exterior: Two large headlamps. Wing mounted side lights incorporate indicator bulb. Hand signals recommended.
Handrails and Guards:	Easy entrance through nearside doors for each row of seats with the advantage of running boards. Once on the move passengers can hold on to the body side or each other.

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£14,950

DAF 200
12-seater, fabric seats, Petrol, C.O.F.
£8,995

TALBOT 1000
12-seater, minibus, seats covered in moquette, plywood floor covered in lino, full soft trim to saloon, interior lights, C.O.F.
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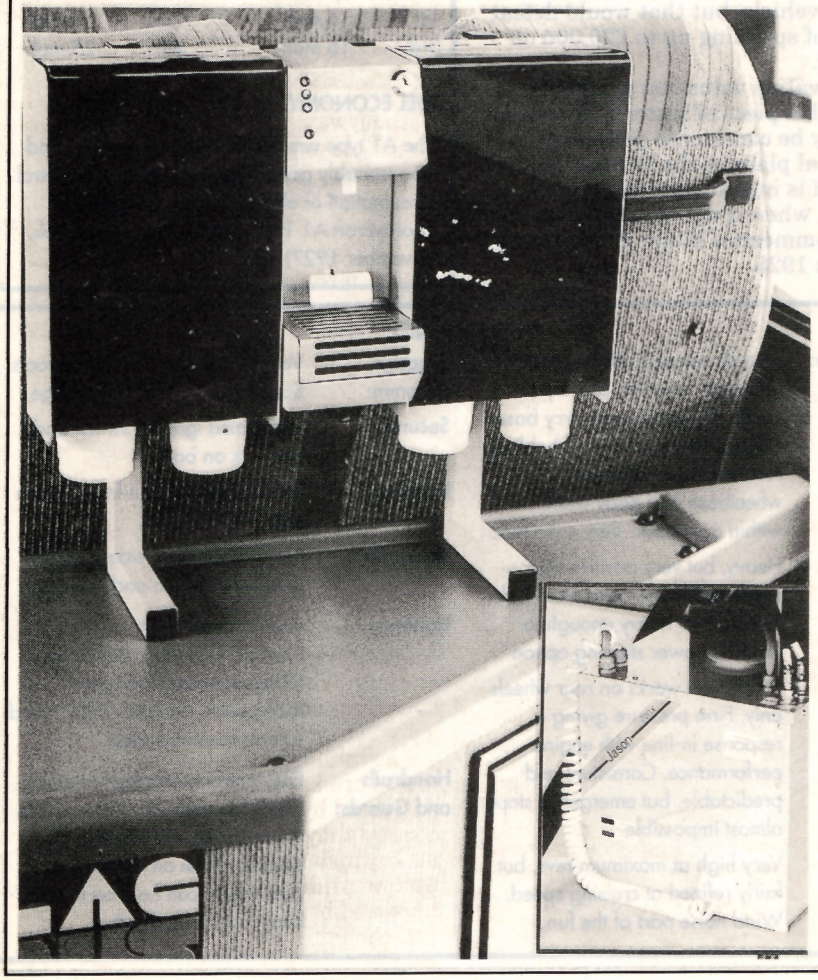

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TV GENERATES NEW BUSINESS

New coaches are a bold investment if bought to consolidate bread-and-butter excursion business. Mike Morgan finds that West Yorkshire operator Abbeyways-Hanson successfully used the strategy to generate more trade.

STEVEN Ives has good reason to be grateful for the pulling power of television. Promotion of the Gateshead Garden Festival regularly filled more than five coaches per week for his Huddersfield-based coach operation Abbeyways-Hanson.

Emmerdale Farm and Granada studios are other TV success stories which have attracted coach business for the same reason.

Theme parks such as Flamingoland have been equally successful, following a 1990 TV campaign. If all top-class excursion venues were so easy to spot, then Abbeyways-Hanson would have its 1991 programme ready in advance of the new season.

But the travelling public's changing whims are notoriously difficult to foresee. Who would have predicted that Matlock illuminations would be more popular with West Yorkshire folk than Blackpool? This was the case in 1990, with Blackpool excursion traffic down 70 percent.

Steven Ives, chairman and major shareholder of Abbeyways-Hanson, is unworried: 'Something comes along each year - usually by accident,' he told *Coachmart*. This is just as well because his company depends on excursions for 50 percent of its income.

Fifty percent of annual income is from excursions.

Steven Ives: new coaches mean new business.

Abbeyways-Hanson's day excursion market is growing - 1990 bookings are up on the previous year, and the company chairman believes his programme of daily excursions is among the biggest in the country.

Excursions with other operators often mean ageing vehicles. But Abbeyways-Hanson is shifting its crowds with near-new Van Hool/Scanias. New coaches mean new business, explained Steven Ives: 'Once they've ridden on a new coach to a shopping centre, they come back for more.'

Emmerdale Farm has been a popular destination: 'We've taken thousands there. It's perhaps the most successful excursion for years.'

At £3 a head, this TV-generated attraction has persuaded many people to book who were not coach orientated. As could be overheard in 'Uthersfield' bus station: 'Who'ivver'd thowt it, ten year back, or mooar, but, by gum, it's 'appened; we've getten a bus.'

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have carefully cultivated the mystery surrounding its real location. It helps if the travelling public believe that only a select few know - the punters love it.

By extending a short trip to Yorkshire's dales into a full tour in a new coach, Abbeyways-Hanson has generated a lot of repeat business. Loyal Yorkshire folk have subsequently parted with cash for more ambitious destinations, such as Lynton and Lynmouth, or the Scottish Lochs.

It's not just Emmerdale which has the desired effect. Shopping trips to Sheffield's Meadowhall trips at £5 a seat are as effective as five coaches per week heading up the A1 to the garden festival.

Ironically Abbeyways-Hanson could not capitalise on that other famous TV-inspired Yorkshire tour to 'Last of the Summer Wine Country.' Compo, Clegg and Foggy's moors are on the doorstep, and it would be truly masterful marketing which regularly filled 53-seaters going six miles to look at Nora Batty's front door.

Before being linked with Hansons in 1989, Abbeyways acquired batches of new coaches in 1981, 1983 and 1985. However, the purchase of nine DAFs with Caetano, Duple or Plaxton coachwork for the newly-combined operation was significant.

'We knew there was potential from Huddersfield for work from two sources. The merger of two companies created the volume to make new vehicles worthwhile, and it proved to be the right move,' said Steven Ives.

The DAFs were replaced within a year by 11 Scania/Van Hools from Stuart Johnson. Steven Ives explained: 'We were quite happy with DAF and Caetano products, but at the time the market was right and the deal offered on the Scanias was too good to miss.'

Does this imply satisfaction? Not at all. From an operating point of view it is better to standardise, and the Scania/Van Hool combination was available at a never to be repeated price. Steven Ives observed: 'If people don't update their fleets now it will be too late.'

Despite being financially involved with Alternative Chassis Engineering (makers of Puma midi-coach and Cougar bus chassis), there is no strong allegiance with one make of vehicle. Abbeyways was long associated with AECs and was one of the first English operators to buy Wrights Consort bodies. However, buying decisions depend on deals available on coaches with the necessary passenger appeal. Said Steven Ives: 'We've never bought a vehicle that's caused us problems.'

The buy-new dilemma hinges on the cost balance between maintenance and interest/finance. Although the Abbeyways-Hanson experience shows that 10-year-old vehicles can earn within £25 per day the same as a new Scania, the new vehicles are much better at generating new business. Hanson Coaching Ltd's managing director, David Peace, said: 'We've had circumstances where people have rung-up and just booked the new coach, regardless of price.'

Hanson: the travel agency, tours and coach booking side of the business.

Hansons is the travel agency, tours, and coach booking arm of the business. It doesn't run any vehicles, but through its Huddersfield bus station office takes in work and hires coaches from Abbeyways - the operating side of the merged businesses, with 25 coaches based in Huddersfield, Mirfield and Halifax.

Once shoppers travel on a new coach they come back.

Steven Ives acquired the Hanson name in 1989 after the company suffered from the financial pressures of the late 80s, but a complex trail led to the merger of interests.

Hanson's coach and bus business was long associated with James Hanson of Hanson Trust fame before being sold to West Yorkshire Passenger Transport Executive in 1974. The sale of Hanson to Abbeyways followed in 1978, before David Peace stepped forward to buy back Hanson one year later. This move coincided with Steven Ives buying Abbeyways, and the two men (both having long associations with their respective company) developed a close working relationship through the next decade leading to the re-connection.

The two are now working together under the Abbeyways-Hanson banner to supply a coaching service beyond the bread-and-butter excursion work. The other half of the turnover comes from a combination of contracts, local bus services, express services, continental tours, a holiday programme, and the inevitable private hire.

A non-stop express service to London's Victoria coach station is a new venture. Loadings have yet to mature, but Steven Ives is anxious that the three daily departures offer an alternative to the National Express service.

Further full-size replacement coaches are not anticipated for a year or so: 'We try to make our money out of operating. But at the present time we couldn't afford £140,000 for a new coach. We don't know how we can rectify this, but we're going to have to.'

Weekly report on law and the coach operator By Michael Jewell

LEGAL NEWS

● FOLLOWING the merger of the Vehicle Inspectorate Executive Agency with the Traffic Examiner organisation, the new structure has been announced.

Traffic examiners will be organised in seven enforcement groups, each headed by an enforcement manager reporting to the national enforcement manager at the Vehicle Inspectorate's headquarters in Bristol.

The Enforcement Group offices will be at Birmingham, Bristol, Cambridge, Eastbourne, Edinburgh, Manchester and Leeds.

The merger of the two organisations follows the recommendations made in the Palmer Report, which was presented to the Department of Transport in October 1989.

The new structure is due to take place in April 1991.

Ron Oliver, chief executive of the Vehicle Inspectorate, said: 'Bringing together traffic examiners and vehicle examiners under a common management structure provides an opportunity for us jointly to improve the effectiveness of our responsibilities in improving road safety and protecting the environment.'

More information is available from John Schock or Richard Lacey at the Vehicle Inspectorate Executive Agency in Bristol. Tel: 0272 543297 or 0272 543389.

● FEWER people died in fewer fatal accidents on Scotland's roads than in any of the last 30 years, according to Road Accidents Scotland 1989 published by the Scottish Office.

But the number killed on Scottish Roads - at 553 - was only one less than 1988.

And the total number of road casualties rose by over eight percent to over 27,500.

Against the general trend, coaches and buses had 36 percent of their accidents while the vehicle was stopping, starting or stationary.

PSVs also had the highest percentage of accidents involving only one vehicle - 43 percent compared with 14 percent for all vehicles.

The report is available from the Scottish Office. Tel: 031 244 1111.

Richards has licence application adjourned

BRYAN Richards, trading as B & D Richards, has had his O-licence application hearing adjourned by South Wales traffic commissioner John Mervyn Pugh.

The application to add five single-decks to his licence for two single-decks and three minibuses has been delayed, as has a disciplinary hearing concerning his failure to keep to an undertaking to park his vehicles at his operating centre at Tonna, in Neath, the issue of a number of prohibition notices, and an objection to the variation application by Neath Borough Council.

Boundary dispute had now been resolved after court case.

When the case first came before the commissioner, it was said that the problem with the borough council related to the parking of vehicles at Cimla Common. Mr Richards' operating centre was at Tonna, but his vehicles were having problems gaining access because of a long-standing dispute between the owners and another operator, a Mr Hopkins.

Mr Richards had a right of access to his operating centre, which lay behind a large garage belonging to a Mr Thomas. However, his attempts to move in had been thwarted by Mr Hopkins. Mr Mervyn Pugh adjourned the hearing to enable Mr Richards an opportunity of finding a fresh operating centre (*Coachmart* 603, August 30).

When the hearing resumed Richard Ambrose, for Mr Richards, sought a further adjournment. He said that at the previous hearing concern had been expressed about the maintenance of Mr Richards' vehicles. A fleet inspection had been due and Mr Richards had been under the impression that if his vehicles passed without problem, that would be evidence that the maintenance situation had been put right.

However, the call-up letter for the current hearing had stated that Mr Richards should bring up to date MoT certificates for all his vehicles. Mr Richards had assumed that the fleet inspection, which was satisfactory but for one matter, would be sufficient.

Mr Ambrose had said that Mr Richards had anticipated that the resumed hearing would have quickly followed the fleet inspection. Mr Mervyn Pugh said that the traffic area office had probably been waiting for news of Cimla Common.

Mr Ambrose said that the problem over Cimla Common had now been resolved. The problem of the boundary dispute involving another operator at Tonna had been resolved by a court case. As far as the variation application was concerned, they wished to have a site meeting with the local authority to discuss the planning situation with regard to the additional vehicles.

Mr Mervyn Pugh said that the Transport Tribunal had stated that every public service vehicle must at all times be in a roadworthy condition. That had been included in the call-up letter to give Mr Richards 'a nod and a wink' and he had not taken heed. When he granted a licence to an operator he needed to know that on that day each and every one of that operator's vehicles were safe.

Five of Mr Richards' vehicles had been through their MoT test in the last few months without any problems, said Mr Ambrose. The vehicle found to be unsatisfactory during the fleet inspection had been damaged in a fire and had been awaiting disposal. There had been a visible improvement in maintenance since January of last year. However, if the commissioner felt it necessary that the remainder of Mr Richards' vehicles be subjected to an MoT test, he would ask for the proceedings to be adjourned for that to be done.

After Mr Mervyn Pugh had commented that a number of fines had been imposed on Mr Richards, Mr Ambrose said that the fine in regard to Cimla Common had been part of that problem.

For the borough council, Mr J Lock said that action had been taken before the Neath magistrates over the problems at Cimla Common which had given the Council cause for concern. There had been some sightings of Mr Richards' buses operating from other sites apart from Tonna, and

Council is investigating the parking of minibuses.

the council were currently investigating the parking of minibuses on land adjacent to a public house. The council was also concerned about whether there was sufficient room for the additional vehicles at Tonna.

Mr Richards said that he had been blocked out of the Tonna premises whilst the court case involving the landlord and the other operator had been going on, and the garage where he purchased his fuel had allowed him to park vehicles at their premises. He was not doing that now. All his vehicles were now kept at Tonna.

Mr Mervyn Pugh said that he believed that Mr Richards had done his best to become a good operator, but he had been beset with certain difficulties. He was happy to adjourn the proceedings until a date to be fixed, and to ask Mr Richards to put every vehicle that had an MoT test prior to the end of October through a further test. Since Mr Richards had last appeared before him,

Weekly report on law and the coach operator By Michael Jewell

the only prohibition notice issued had been imposed on the bus that had burnt out. That seemed to show the system of planned maintenance was working.

Mr Richards said that he was having his vehicles inspected every three weeks. Asked about a fine for having no fire extinguishers on two buses, he said that when two of his buses were following the bus that caught fire and their drivers used their fire extinguishers. The extinguishers were therefore empty when the vehicles went out the next day. There was a suspicion there had been a 'tip off.'

Mr Richards was now carrying two spare extinguishers to replace any that had been used.

Adjourning the hearing until a date to be fixed not later than the end of January, Mr Mervyn Pugh said he had to be satisfied that Mr Richards' vehicles were safe at all times.

PROBLEMS at Scott Cam Mini Coaches led Scottish traffic commissioner Keith Waterworth to cut the firm's O-licence from eight to seven vehicles, and to terminate it two years earlier.

The licence now expires at the end of August 1991, instead of August 1993. Mr Waterworth has imposed a condition on the licence prohibiting Mr Campbell from using vehicles to provide any local services other than those registered by him on December 19, 1990.

The commissioner was told that Mr Campbell had ceased operating a registered local service, after losing the contract for its provision, without giving the required 42 days notice.

Company loses licence after maintenance problems

A SMOKING exhaust reported by a member of the public and other maintenance problems have led the traffic commissioner to terminate the O-licence of Webster and Sons, of Derbyshire, two years early.

The licence held by Alan Ward of Webster's, based at Hognaston, near Ashbourne, finishes in December 1991 instead of 1993 following the disciplinary hearing before the Eastern traffic commissioner Brigadier Compton Boyd.

Mr Ward holds a licence authorising the operation of six vehicles. Evidence was given by a DTp vehicle examiner about the imposition of one immediate prohibition, two delayed prohibitions and five defect notices on Mr Ward's vehicles, in June, July and August.

He said that an immediate prohibition had been placed on one vehicle during the national deregulation check, when another vehicle examiner inspected the topside only of one of Mr Ward's vehicles. Clearance of that prohibition was subsequently refused, and variation notices were issued when further defects were found.

Following a complaint from a member of the public, he had observed one of Mr Ward's vehicles emitting excessive black smoke. He followed it to Ashbourne Bus Station, where he imposed a delayed prohibition notice. An examination of the inspection records, showed that they were not consistent with the condition of the vehicles. He agreed that the other delayed prohibition had been imposed on a vehicle that was under repair, and he said that he had found some improvement during a recent visit.

Mr Ward said that he had acquired the business in 1973, and he currently had four vehicles. One of the defect notices had related to a minibus which was not a PSV. He had had problems 11 years ago, resulting in his appearance at public inquiries in 1977, 1978 and 1979, which had been caused by an unsatisfactory fitter.

The person concerned had gone and was replaced by Robert Sharpe. Until now, there had been no problems over the maintenance of the vehicles since he had employed Mr Sharpe. He did not think that Mr Sharpe's capabilities had suddenly altered. Mr Sharpe had a free hand over the purchase of parts.

He had been devastated to receive the defect notices, said Mr Ward. He could only think that the Ministry standards had suddenly been raised, or Mr Sharpe's had suddenly gone down for no apparent reason.

In June Mr Sharpe had been driving on schools services on a daily basis, as the regular driver had been away on holiday for a month. That could possibly be the reason why the maintenance standards dropped. Mr Ward was away for the first two weeks of July, so Mr Sharpe had been driving for a period of six weeks.

Mr Ward said that the sale of the business was currently going through as he had decided to retire. The purchaser was already an operator. The contracts were in the process of being drawn up and he anticipated the sale would be completed in January.

In reply to Brigadier Boyd, Mr Ward said that he was not alleging that the DTp vehicle examiner was conducting a vendetta. But when examiners found faults, they tended to lean on an operator. He was operating old buses, which he would have replaced if he had not been seeking to retire.

He accepted that maintenance could have been found wanting, but said that he also felt that the standards had been raised by the vehicle examiner. A lot of the defects listed had been a matter of opinion. It was not his intention to turn out vehicles that were not fit for the road. His vehicles did not cover many miles a year, and did not go more than 12 miles from base.

Mr Sharpe said that there had been only two previous prohibition notices in the time he had been with Mr Ward. He felt that he had paid less attention to maintenance over the six weeks he had been driving regularly and that he had, perhaps, become complacent.

Cutting the duration of the licence, Brigadier Boyd said that he did so as a probationary measure. He had to trust operators to fulfil declarations that they would keep their vehicles in a fit and serviceable condition, as vehicle examiners could not check every vehicle every morning before it went out.

He did not feel he had a satisfactory explanation for the prohibition notices. However, on the credit side there had been no problems over the previous 10 to 11 years, and the position was now very much better.

Glue sniffing is blamed

A SPATE of glue sniffing was blamed for both first-aid pack and fire extinguisher being removed from an operator's coach when it was checked.

Porth-based coach operator Cambrian Coaches - whose licence was curtailed in September after maintenance problems - was said to be 'like Damocles, with a sword hanging over his head by a thread' when he again appeared before the South Wales traffic commissioner John Mervyn Pugh.

David Letherby, who trades as Cambrian Coaches, of High Street, Cymmer, was seeking the renewal of the his O-licence at a Cardiff public inquiry.

Accepting that he had problems over the maintenance of his one vehicle, Mr Letherby said that he was doing the maintenance checks himself, so he knew that they were being done correctly. Admitting that he had been convicted by the Porth Magistrates for having no first aid kit or fire extinguisher on a coach, Mr Letherby said that they had been put in the boot, as there had been a recent death as a result of solvent sniffing. His assistant had removed the items for safe keeping.

Renewing the licence in respect of one vehicle until the end of March only, Mr Mervyn Pugh said that last September it had been quite clear something was wrong.

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Hotels: the choice is yours

CHOICE Hotels has launched its new Travel and Vacation Directory for 1991.

The directory, updated twice a year, lists special features; worldwide toll free reservation telephone numbers; rates effective to 30 April, 1991 and useful location maps for all Sleep, Comfort, Quality and Clarion hotels worldwide.

Choice is also planning a new series of Murder Weekends for 1991. New crimes will take place at Bournemouth, Chester, Swindon and Llandrindod Wells.

More details from Julia Clark on 071 938 2222. A Murder Weekends brochure is available by calling 0800 44 44 44.

Exhibition is on the right lines

THE 1991 International Model Railway Exhibition is set to be the largest yet with over 130 stands. But the organisers say prices are to be held at last year's levels.

Firm favourites such as the gauge one live steam layout will be featured alongside a host of new tracks.

The largest layout this year will be Parkwood Manor which measures 38.5 feet by 24 feet. Based on the Southern Region Railway, it can run in the late steam and early diesel period of the 1950s and 1960s or present day network SouthEast period.

Children - and adults - will be able to operate the Matterdale layout, with its colour light signals against a 1950s street scene and featuring Thomas the Tank Engine.

Trade stands will be selling kits, boxed models, books and magazines.

IMREX will be held at the Royal Horticultural Society's Halls, Westminster from 30 March to 4 April. Operators making advance bookings will get a 25 percent discount on the normal adult entrance fee of £6.00.

More details from John Geach on 071 833 1840.

Craftsmen will flock to show

SIX hundred of the country's top crafts people will be at Hatfield House in Hertfordshire in May for the 17th annual Living Crafts event.

The event, the largest and longest established of its kind in Europe, will be held in the grounds of the historic house, home of the Marquess of Salisbury, on May 9-12.

Some 250 crafts will be on show in 11 gigantic marquees and buildings within the stable yard and Old Palace of Hatfield. The majority of the crafts will be demonstrated in what the organisers describe as 'pure theatre.'

Two of the more unusual crafts being exhibitited for the first time in 1991 include cricket ball making and natural stone carving. To celebrate the 500th anniversary of Henry V111's birth, the Trafalgar Gun Company will be demonstrating cannon making.

There will also be English clog dancing, Punch and Judy and giant chess games with pieces measuring three feet high to keep the expected 30,000 visitors entertained.

More details from organiser Jean Young on 05827 61235.

Get to know Britain

TRAVEL publisher Berlitz has launched a guide to the British Isles called Blueprint Britain.

Although specifically aimed at the independent traveller, the guide is useful for coach operators planning British tours. As well as a large scale 20 page road atlas, the guide contains 35 leisure routes for special interests - along with what to see and do, plus selected restaurant and hotel recommendations.

In its background section on Britain and the British, invaluable for operators engaged on incoming tour work, the guide contains facts and figures and details of historical landmarks. For example, it gives a concise lowdown on this country's geography, population and lists the major cities.

It also gives details of climate, government and religion.

The book contains detailed sections on London as well as such areas as East Anglia and the Fens, the North of England, Wales and Scotland. And it backs this up with a calendar of special events.

Blueprint for Britain is available from most good bookshops. Price £9.95.

Get ready for MOOT

ROLL up for MOOT 91, England's tourism marketplace, is the message from the show's organisers, Christine Pott (right) and Sheila Hughes.

Again coach operators are the prime buyer targets and the English Tourist Board is aiming for a record breaking turnout.

The show, which will take place at the NEC, Birmingham on 17 April and 18 April 1991, will feature almost 300 exhibitors representing over 500 attractions, hotels, towns, cities, resorts and holiday areas.

More information from the MOOT 91 Office at the ETB on 081 846 9000.

MOOT 91: aimed at coach operators.

New London hotel opens

PARK Hotels has completed the latest phase of its three year London investment programme with the opening of The Hyde Park Towers Hotel in Bayswater.

Park now has five properties in London and eleven throughout the UK.

The Hyde Park Towers has re-opened as a luxury property with 115 bedrooms. All have private bathroom, television, radio, tea and coffee making facilities, direct dial telephone, hair dryer and trouser press. There are also three function rooms.

Le Parc restaurant offers two table d'hote style menus - one at £13.95 and one at £19.85.

The final phase of the group's expansion plans will be the opening of a new extension at The Cheltenham Park Hotel this spring.

More details from Stuart Constable on 0494 442334.

Robin Hood will be an even merrier place

HERITAGE attraction Tales of Robin Hood in Nottingham has announced £150,000 worth of expansion plans due to be completed by Easter 1991.

Five major new elements will be added to the medieval adventure:

- Shoot the Sheriff - learn archery with Robin Hood.
- The Greenwood Tree - food and refreshment in a medieval setting.
- Robin Hood Country - an audio-visual show.
- Telling the Tales - how Robin Hood stories grew over 700 years.
- Nottingham Goose Fair - all the fun of the fair recreated at Robin Hood's time.

This further phase will extend a visit to over two hours. The Tales of Robin Hood is expecting to attract over 200,000 visitors this year, making it the leading indoor tourist attraction in the Midlands.

More details from Stella Pearson on 0602 483284.

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1983	Bristol LHS/Plaxton 3500, Radio/PA	33	£21,000
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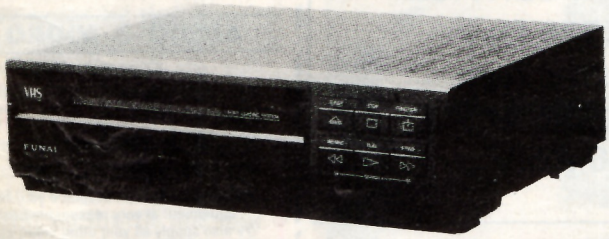

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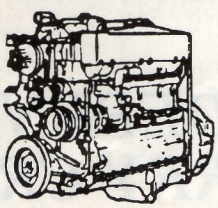

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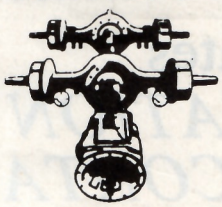

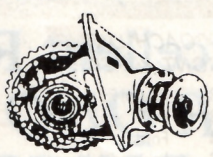

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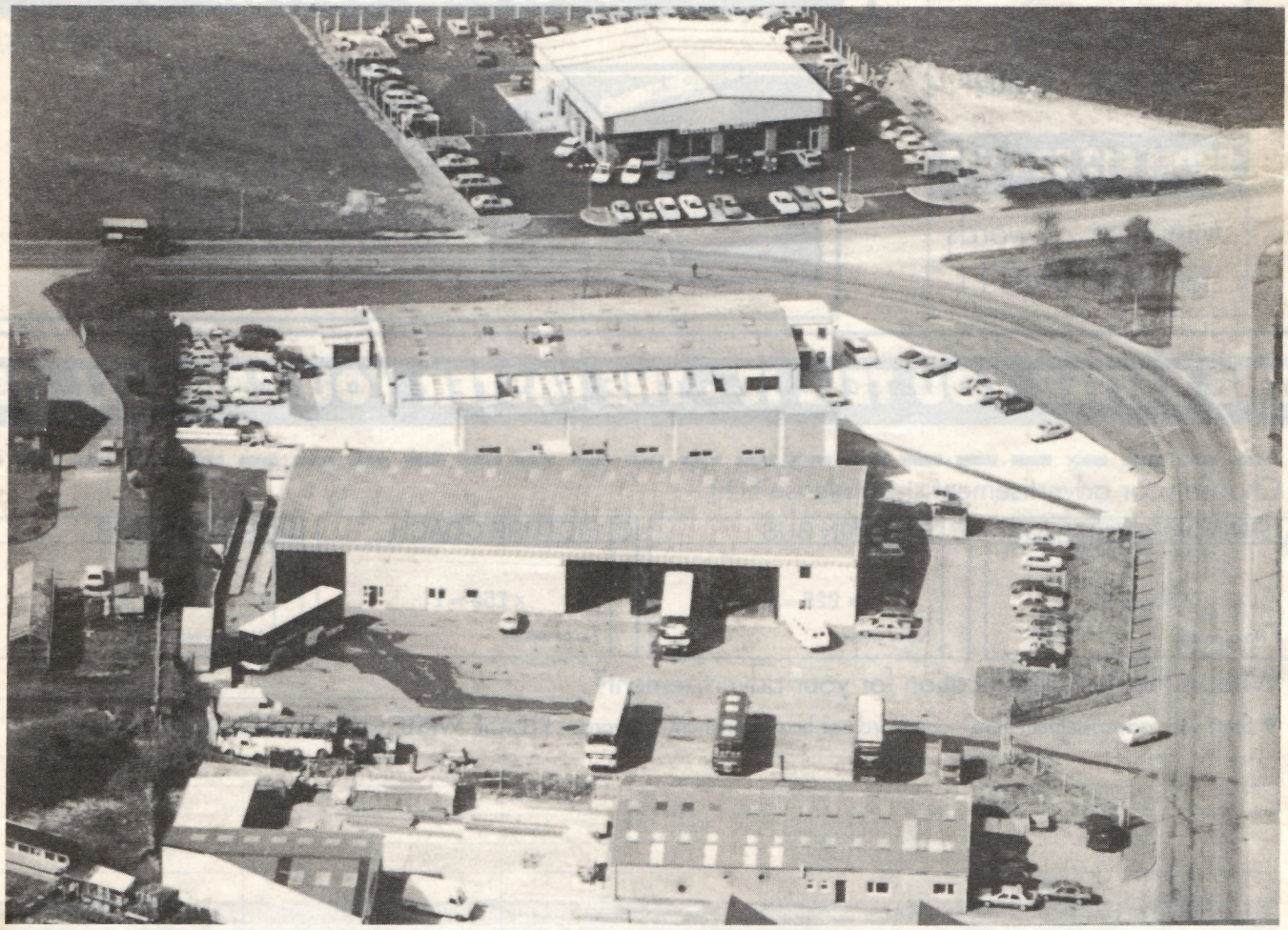

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